

# Safeguarding in uncertain times – do not forget the record keeping

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**Please note: the information contained in this legal update is correct as of the original date of publication**

There is so much understandable focus on the pressures NHS frontline workers face today that it is easy to forget what enormous challenges safeguarding teams and their managers also have to address; making decisions in the teeth of daily changing government policy, closing schools, an anxious workforce, and engaging with families who are vulnerable and sometimes chaotic at the best of times.

We know that you and your teams are working away, apparently invisibly, doing your best to support families and to take measures to receive children into care where it is absolutely necessary.

Its clear this is happening whilst the capacity of residential and fostering systems are, themselves, enormously stretched.

We have been working with and for child protection services for decades. One of the principal parts of our work is advising on claims made by individuals, frequently decades into adulthood, alleging that social services teams failed to protect them from abusive behaviour within their own families. That abusive behaviour often includes sexual abuse, but equally frequently we are seeing claims that children were avoidably neglected, underfed, physically abused and denied the medical treatment they needed.

Years later they lay the blame at the feet of child protection services. This means we have to investigate and act for those services. The best and most accurate record of:

- what happened
- when
- why

is in the social services records and policy documents that survive.

So during these difficult times, our message is do not forget to record how you make your decisions and why. We are conscious that in terms of allocating resources, identifying the children and families in most need, and making “least worst” decisions is going to become a daily challenge for our social work and child protection colleagues. Context will be everything.

Similarly please use your best endeavours to make sure a record is kept of each broader policy and practice decision, the factors that were taken into account at the time and any actions that were followed up as a result.

In future years, history will understand that all frontline services needed to make difficult choices, some of which needed to be changed weekly or even reversed in light of fresh data, changing resources and competing priorities. Find the resources to keep a record of that decision making and store it logically and you will be much better placed to quickly and efficiently address short, medium and longer term challenges in the future about the decisions you make today.

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